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INFO ECOWAS COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DAKAR 002990

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TAGS: PREL PHUM SG

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT WADE SEIZES OPPORTUNITY TO DISTANCE HIMSELF FROM LIBYA

REF: DAKAR 2916

CLASSIFIED BY POLITICAL OFFICER CHRIS ROCHESTER.  
REASONS 1.5 (B)(D)

¶1. (U) ON AUGUST 28, SENECALESE AUTHORITIES REFUSED PERMISSION TO APPROXIMATELY 100 YOUNG WOMEN TO BOARD A LIBYAN CHARTERED AIRCRAFT, WHICH APPARENTLY LANDED WITHOUT PROPER AUTHORIZATION, AND WHICH WAS ALLEGEDLY TAKING THE WOMEN TO LIBYA TO PARTICIPATE IN A CULTURAL EVENT CELEBRATING THE THIRTY-SECOND ANNIVERSARY OF THE LIBYAN REVOLUTION. WHAT BEGAN AS A SUSPECTED TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS MATTER QUICKLY INTENSIFIED TO A SIGNIFICANT DIPLOMATIC INCIDENT BETWEEN LIBYA AND SENEGAL.

¶2. (U) SENECALESE AUTHORITIES STRONGLY SUSPECTED THAT THE CULTURAL PRETEXT WAS IN FACT A BLATANT OPERATION IN HUMAN TRAFFICKING. ON AUGUST 31, THE DAKAR PROSECUTOR FORMALLY CHARGED AND DETAINED THREE WOMEN, WHO WERE SUSPECTED OF COORDINATING THE SCHEME. THE LIBYAN GOVERNMENT DENIED ANY INVOLVEMENT IN TRAFFICKING AND CLAIMED THAT IT HAD SENT THE AIRCRAFT TO DAKAR SOLELY TO BRING A SENECALESE DANCE TROUPE (NUMBERING APPROXIMATELY THIRTY-FIVE MEMBERS) TO LIBYA. THE TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS ALLEGATIONS ARE SERIOUS, BUT THE MORE INTERESTING ASPECT OF THE MATTER HAS BEEN THE RESPONSE BY THE GOVERNMENT OF SENEGAL.

¶3. (C) THE GOS REACTED PUBLICLY AND VIGOROUSLY. FOREIGN MINISTER GADIO DEPLORED THE INCIDENT IN A ROUND OF MEDIA APPEARANCES AS "AN UNFRIENDLY ACT." THE PRESIDENTIAL SPOKESMAN ANNOUNCED THAT THE GOS WAS TAKING A NUMBER OF STEPS IN RESPONSE TO THE INCIDENT: THE GOS WAS RECALLING AMBASSADOR MAMADOU DIOUF FROM TRIPOLI FOR CONSULTATIONS; A DIPLOMATIC NOTE HAD BEEN CONVEYED TO LIBYAN AUTHORITIES; LIBYA WAS REQUIRED TO REDUCE ITS DIPLOMATIC PRESENCE IN SENEGAL; THE NUMBER OF TRANSIT VISAS FOR LIBYAN NATIONALS WOULD BE RESTRICTED. FINALLY, PRESIDENT WADE SPOKE OUT ABOUT THE MATTER PUBLICLY, SAYING THAT THE INCIDENT WAS "AN UNFRIENDLY GESTURE TOWARD SENEGAL." HE ADDED THAT HE WAS HURT ("BLESSE") THAT THIS HAD HAPPENED AND THAT HIS FIRST DUTY WAS "TO PROTECT THE SENECALESE PEOPLE." HE NOTED, WITHOUT ELABORATION, THAT THE INCIDENT "WAS NOT AN ACCIDENT" AND THAT THERE HAD BEEN "PRECEDENTS" FOR THIS KIND OF THING WITH LIBYA. ASKED IF HE WERE CONSIDERING FURTHER DIPLOMATIC SANCTIONS, PRESIDENT WADE REPLIED THAT HE WOULD MAKE FURTHER DECISIONS AFTER CONSULTING WITH HIS RECALLED AMBASSADOR.

¶4. (C) THE DETAILS OF THE ALLEGED HUMAN TRAFFICKING INCIDENT AND THE EVENTUAL JOURNEY - LONG OR ABBREVIATED - OF THE CASE THROUGH THE COURTS ARE OF INTEREST, BUT MORE SIGNIFICANT IS THE PROBABILITY THAT PRESIDENT WADE TOOK ADVANTAGE OF THE INCIDENT TO SEND A VIGOROUS PUBLIC MESSAGE TO THE SENECALESE PEOPLE, THE REGION AND THE WEST THAT HE INTENDED TO KEEP HIS DISTANCE FROM LIBYA. WHEN ADDED TO OTHER RECENT, LESS PUBLIC, REMARKS TO US BY PRESIDENT WADE (REFTEL), THE IMPRESSION IS THAT THE PRESIDENT HAS DECIDED TO ABRUPTLY DECELERATE WHAT HAD BEEN AN ACTIVE POLICY OF HIGH-LEVEL CONTACTS WITH LIBYA.

¶ 15. (C) PRESIDENT WADE VISITED TRIPOLI SEVERAL TIMES SOON AFTER HIS ELECTION (NOT TO MENTION CONTACTS WHILE HE WAS IN THE OPPOSITION). KHADAFI MADE A NUMBER OF PROMISES TO WADE, BOTH FINANCIAL AND PAN-AFRICAN (PARTICULARLY CONCERNING THE AFRICAN UNION), THAT CONFORMED TO HIS USUAL PATTERN OF INGRATIATION. PRESIDENT WADE APPEARED TO BE PERSUADED AT THE TIME THAT THE LIBYAN PROMISES (INCLUDING TO SUPPLY OIL AT DISCOUNT PRICES, TO PROVIDE ASSISTANCE IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF AN OIL REFINERY, TO MAKE OTHER LARGE BUT UNSPECIFIED INVESTMENTS IN SENEGAL AND WEST AFRICA AND TO SUPPORT REGIONAL AND PAN-AFRICAN POLITICAL PROJECTS), WERE SERIOUS. THERE IS NOW A REAL DEGREE OF TENSION, EVEN BITTERNESS, BETWEEN SENEGAL AND LIBYA, GENERATED BY AN APPARENTLY SHARP REVERSAL OF SENECALESE CONFIDENCE IN TRIPOLI.

¶ 16. (C) FORMER FOREIGN MINISTER DJIBO KA MAY HAVE BEEN ON TARGET WHEN HE SAID IN A RECENT INTERVIEW THAT THIS CHILL IN BILATERAL RELATIONS WAS INEVITABLE, GIVEN THE EXCESSIVE ENTHUSIASM, EVEN "AMATEURISM," OF SENECALESE RELATIONS WITH LIBYA SINCE THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION. KA ARGUED THAT IF SENEGAL WISHED TO BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY BY "THE COUNTRIES AND INSTITUTIONS THAT COUNT IN THE WORLD," IT HAD TO STAY THE COURSE DIPLOMATICALLY AS A DEMOCRATIC COUNTRY GIVING PRIORITY TO OTHER DEMOCRATIC NATIONS.

ELAM-THOMAS